

Chapter 2



Canada Geese on Marsh 300

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

- Planning Process
- Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities
- Final Decision

Chapter 2

The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process

Planning Process

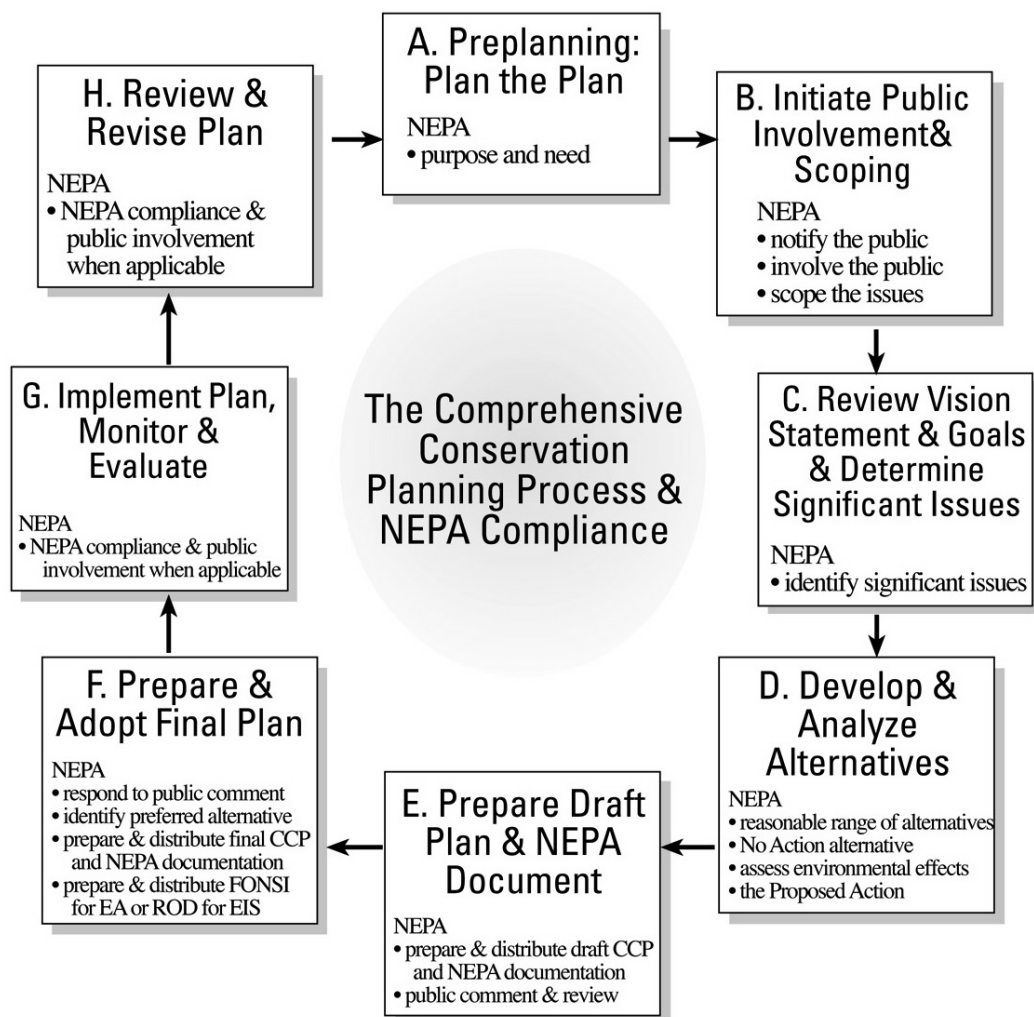
Service policy establishes an eight-step planning process for development of a CCP. This planning process also facilitates compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, Figure 2-1). Each individual step of the planning process is described in detail in the Planning Policy and CCP training materials (602 FWS 3, “The Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process”). The Planning Policy can be accessed at: <http://policy.fws.gov/602fw3.html>.

The key to effective conservation begins with community involvement. To ensure future management of the refuge takes into consideration the issues, concerns, and opportunities expressed by the public, multiple public involvement techniques were used: In the spring of 2008, staff at Iroquois Refuge sought public input on all aspects of refuge management as part of the planning process. An introductory newsletter was mailed to over 360 refuge neighbors, sporting groups, local politicians, conservation groups, and State agencies to inform them of the CCP development process. Copies of the newsletter were also available at the refuge visitor contact station, through the refuge Web site, and at community outreach events. Iroquois Refuge staff hosted public meetings on April 8, 9 and 10, 2008 in Batavia, Albion and the refuge headquarters in Alabama, respectively. Each day the public could attend either an open house style meeting in the afternoon or a more structured meeting in the evening. Approximately 20 people attended over the 3 days. A written public comment period was also open from February 26, 2008 through April 30, 2008 during which time people could mail, email, or drop off comments. Personalized written comments were received from 41 individuals and several stakeholder groups. Participants were encouraged to actively express their opinions and suggestions. The public meetings allowed us to gather information and ideas from local residents, adjacent landowners, and various organizations and agencies. Updates regarding the progress of the CCP were provided via newsletters, Web site updates, and at outreach events.

A Notice of Availability (NOA) was published in the *Federal Register* announcing the release of the draft CCP/EA and it was distributed for public comment. During that 30 day period of public review, we held 2 public meetings to obtain comments. We received comments by regular mail, electronic mail, and as testimony in those public meetings. After the public review of the draft CCP/EA, we reviewed and analyzed all written and oral comments to help inform development of this final CCP. A summary of public comments and our responses to them are presented in appendix H of this CCP.

This CCP identifies the Service-preferred alternative. A Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) was written to certify that this CCP has met all Service requirements, that it achieves refuge purposes and fulfills the mission of the Refuge System. The CCP and FONSI were then submitted to the Service Regional Director for final review and approval. Implementation begins with the approval of this final CCP. The CCP may be modified following the procedures in Service policy (602 FW 1, 3, and 4) and NEPA requirements as part of “Step H: Review and Revise Plan.” Minor revisions that meet the criteria for categorical exclusions (550 FW 3.3C) will require only an Environmental Action Memorandum. We must fully revise CCPs every 15 years.

Figure 2-1 Steps in the Comprehensive Conservation Planning Process and its Relationship to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969



Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

As part of the CCP planning process we developed a list of key issues, other issues, and opportunities from our scoping, public, focus group, and planning team meetings.

Key issues are public, partner, or Service concerns that do not have obvious solutions and warrant further consideration and investigation. Along with the refuge goals stated above, these key issues helped guide our development and analysis of the Service preferred alternatives presented in chapter 4 of this CCP, “Management Direction and Implementation.” Key issues include the following:

Habitat management - Habitat management strategies utilized by the refuge are often interpreted by the public as mismanagement or lack of management. Currently, refuge staff must analyze and determine whether isolated habitats surrounded by a different habitat (i.e., small grassland surrounded by shrublands) are as beneficial as one continuous, connected habitat. Determining what type of habitat will provide the best nesting and breeding grounds for many different species, and how that management is implemented in the future, is a primary focus of this CCP.

Drainage - A system of dikes and water control structures regulate water levels on the refuge to mimic the historic flood and drought cycle in a natural, undisturbed marsh. Homeowners within the floodplain to the east and north of the refuge have expressed concerns with the refuge's system of holding and releasing water, stating that they can be unnecessarily flooded during peak runoff periods.

Development - Potential industrial development around the refuge (e.g., windfarm, quarry, industrial park, roads, and bridges) may result in adverse impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat. The refuge must understand and evaluate these potential development threats and determine the best way to counter, mitigate, or adapt to changes in land use around the refuge.

Increased visitor access for recreation - Area residents have requested that the refuge increase opportunities and access for recreational activities. These activities include boating, hunting, and wildlife photography. Additionally, some people would also like to see more trails, more youth activities, and more access for persons with disabilities. The Service recognizes the importance of visitors to National Wildlife Refuges. Furthermore, the Improvement Act mandates providing wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for the public if they do not conflict with wildlife and habitat management activities, and if they are consistent with public safety.

Hunting conflicts - Some waterfowl hunters have expressed a desire to lengthen the waterfowl hunting season (usually late October to mid-November) into the deer hunting season (usually beginning mid-November). The potential conflict between different types of hunting and between hunting and wildlife habitat needs was evaluated.

Staffing - The refuge currently is operating with a staff of 6 full-time employees, which is a 50 percent reduction from its historic staffing level. The refuge also administratively oversees and manages Erie Refuge in northwestern Pennsylvania, providing administrative and supervisory support to that station.

Facilities - The visitor services area is outdated and unable to fully meet the current and anticipated future needs of visitors. Co-locating with other Service offices (e.g., Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office in Amherst, NY) is being considered as a way to reduce government expenditures. The existing refuge headquarters would need to be updated and expanded to accommodate visitor needs and to provide enough office space for both refuge staff and staff associated with the Lower Great Lakes Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office.

Invasive Species - Non-native invasive plant, fish and wildlife species threaten valuable refuge habitat and species populations. These non-native species out-compete native species, resulting in reduced biodiversity and decreased critical food sources and quality breeding habitat. Once invasive species are established, eliminating them can be expensive and labor-intensive. Unfortunately, they establish easily, reproduce prolifically, and disperse readily, making eradication difficult. The most common non-native invasive plant species found on the refuge are common reed, autumn olive, purple loosestrife, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, bittersweet, and multi-flora rose. The common carp is the most prevalent non-native invasive fish species and European starling and house sparrow are the two most common non-native bird species found on the refuge.

Law enforcement - Law enforcement capability has been greatly reduced on the refuge. There is only one officer splitting duties among five refuges across three states. Some current problems on the refuge include trespassing, vandalism, poaching, illegal drugs, and littering/dumping. Thus, there is a need for increased enforcement and outreach for resource management issues associated with public access and public effects.

Partnerships - The refuge relies on partnerships with several organizations and individuals for helping with refuge programs and other efforts. These existing partnerships include, but are not limited to, volunteers, the Friends of Iroquois Refuge, Buffalo Audubon Society, other NGOs, the Iroquois Job Corps Center, local waterfowl associations, and colleges/universities. Establishing new, or improving existing partnerships, will help achieve the goals of the CCP.

Other Issues to Address: Some issues and management concerns are also presented and discussed in chapter 4, but not in as great detail as the key issues. Many of these types of issues are resolved in a similar manner in chapter 4. Additionally, some issues fall outside the scope of this document. More specifically, they fall outside the purpose of and need for action as we describe in this CCP. These issues include, but are not limited to, global warming, development, and non-point source runoff. These issues may be discussed in the document, but cannot be resolved solely by the Service in the 15-year timeframe of the plan.

Final Decision

The Service's Region 5 Director has made the final determination of a preferred alternative to serve as the CCP for Iroquois Refuge. This final determination is based on the Service and Refuge System missions, the purposes for which the refuge was established, other legal mandates, and public and partner responses to the draft CCP. The final decision identifies the desired combination of species protection, habitat management, public use and access, and administration for the refuge.

A FONSI was prepared that briefly describes why the proposed action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The FONSI also certifies that we have met agency compliance requirements and that the CCP, when implemented, will achieve the purposes of the refuge and help fulfill the Refuge System mission. With the Regional Director signature of the FONSI we have completed the CCP for the refuge and implementation can begin.